

# THE SPARK



***An alternative economic strategy for workers?***

***End the siege of Gaza AND end Zionism***

***Theory: Queer liberation in New Zealand***

***Labour MPs play card tricks on the public***

***Interview: Resistance in Greece***

***Wellington: Brass Razoo solidarity band marks 10 years***

***MARXISM 2010 conference report***

**\$1**





# Donate to The Spark

38 9002 0817250 01

## Workers Party Platform

1. Opposition to all New Zealand and Western intervention in the Third World, and all Western military alliances.
2. Jobs for all with a living wage and shorter working week.
3. For the unrestricted right of workers to organise and take industrial action, and no limits on workers' freedom of speech and activity.
4. For working class unity and solidarity - equality for women, Maori and other ethnic minorities and people of all sexual orientations and identities; open borders and full rights for migrant workers.
5. For a working people's republic.

## Workers Party regional contacts - join us or get involved

Wellington: Don  
0211404359

Christchurch: Byron  
021815145

Auckland: Mike  
02102469817

Hamilton: Jared  
0294949863

Dunedin: Alastair  
0277119591

## The Spark production team

Coordinating editors: Don Franks and Jared Phillips

Editors: Mike Kay and John Edmundson.

Layout: Becky Broad.

Front cover: (clockwise from top left) Greece, Wellington, Wellington, Palestine.

## Noisy protest greets John Key in Christchurch

About one hundred protesters greeted New Zealand Prime Minister John Key outside the Isaac Theatre Royal in Christchurch on Wednesday June 9. The picket was organised by the group *Our Water, Our Vote* to protest the National government's decision to sack all fourteen members of the Canterbury Regional Council and cancel the election scheduled for later this year, as well as suspending water conservation orders on Canterbury rivers. A message on the *Our Water, Our Vote* website read:

We need to show John Key and the nation that we are not happy with the dismissal of our elected councillors and his plans for our water. He needs to know that we do not want our rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers destroyed. He also needs to know that we do not want agribusiness to be given vast quantities of pure water free of charge while we are forced to pay high water rates for a restricted supply of chlorinated and contaminated water.

Placards with "Let our rivers be" and "Stop Key stealing our water" were held up by the crowd. There was loud chanting of "You can't drink money, you can't drink shit, you can't steal our votes and get away with it."

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) was also present protesting \$400 million in cuts to early childhood education. NZEI members held up signs reading "The biggest cuts to the smallest people" and handed out leaflets.

The Spark July 2010 Vol. 20, No. 6, Issue No 237 Published by the Workers' Party of New Zealand PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland, New Zealand.



# "The unpalatable truth" : a critique of the Council of Trade Unions Alternative Economic Strategy

Philip Ferguson

Over the past quarter century, workers in New Zealand have been working longer, harder and faster for less pay and in worse conditions. For instance, as Unite union's national director, Mike Treen, calculated, using official government figures on wages, in the period from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, real wages – what your wages can actually buy – declined by 25 percent. This decline was the result of the policies of the fourth Labour government and the first term of the fourth National government. Since then, wages have not recovered and remain only three-quarters of their 1982 level. (See: <http://www.unite.org.nz/?q=node/704>)

The transfer of wealth upwards is also revealed in the fact that corporate profits as a share of GDP rose from 34% in the mid-1980s to 46% in 2005, while wages as a share of GDP fell from 57% at the end of the Muldoon era to 42% in 2005.

## Much longer hours

About 36% of full-time male workers and nearly 19% of full-time female workers now work 50 or more hours a week. Almost 16.5% of full-time male workers and almost 8.5% of full-time female workers actually work more than 60 hours a week. Over half of agricultural and fisheries workers and about 35% of plant and machine operators and assemblers work more than 50 hours a week and a majority of both these groups working more than 50 hours are actually putting in more than 60 hours a week.

By far the largest number of male workers plus the largest number of female workers work 40-49 hour weeks (see chart). Instead of life getting easier, it's getting more filled up with work. Over a century

after winning the 40-hour week, most workers are working more than 40 hours, while many other workers are under-employed through being in part-time and insecure jobs on low wages or are unemployed and struggling to get by on the measly dole.

## Workers forced backwards

At the same time, workers' basic defence organisations, the trade unions, have been drastically weakened. Trade union membership over the past decade has hovered around 21-22% of wage and salary earners, down from over 50% before the 1991 Employment Contracts Act (ECA). At the end of 1985 unions in New Zealand had just over 683,000 members; today they have about 388,000 members in

a much-expanded labour force.

These facts are the result of a largely one-sided class war waged against workers and trade unions by the employers, backed up by successive Labour and National governments and the power of the state. Since the top union leadership sabotaged workers' fight to stop the ECA, industrial struggles in this country have been at a low-point, as have the expectations of much of the working class.

## What can be done about it?

What is to be done to turn this situation around is, clearly, a very difficult and complex question to answer. One response has come from the Council of Trade Unions (CTU), in the form of a suggested Alternative Economic Strategy. The AES was put forward at last year's CTU conference, an amended draft was then discussed at a National Affiliates Council meeting in May this year and the final version is about to be released as we go to print.

The CTU paper argues that "principles... (of) 'fairness, participation, security, improving living standards, and sustainability' should guide economic policy and create 'an economy that works for everyone'. At the same time, they 'accept that efficiency, productivity and return on investment are vital characteristics of a functioning and effective economy'."

But, already, there is a serious problem. The New Zealand economy is not of some indeterminate type; it's a specifically capitalist economy. A small class of capitalists buy the labour-power (ability to work) of a large class of workers who are paid a wage (for the capitalist, in Marxist terms, this is variable capital); the workers then produce goods and services of a greater economic value than the combination of what they are





**Council of Trade Unions (CTU) president Helen Kelly**

paid and the other costs of the capitalists. This extra value – surplus-value – produced through the labour-power of the workers is then the source of capitalist profit.

The greater the difference between the outlay of variable capital and surplus-value, the greater the profit for the capitalists. So we have a fundamental contradiction, right at the very heart of the economy – the production process.

In other words, in a specifically capitalist economy, there is no such thing as a fair wage or fair profit; there can't be fairness for everyone because the existence of private profit itself is the result of exploitation.

## The productivity scam

Moreover, this contradiction permeates all aspects of a capitalist economy. Take the issue of productivity, for instance. Both the employers and the CTU leadership advocate increasing this, but what does it mean within the context of a capitalist economy?

Increases in productivity can come about in two basic ways. The main one for three decades after WW2 in developed capitalist countries such as New Zealand, was expanding investment in new machines and technology. This means more goods can be efficiently produced in a shorter space of time and makes each worker more productive. This is the most effective form of increasing productivity. While this form of increasing productivity is generally accompanied by less wear and

tear on workers, it still means that they end up with a smaller share of the total wealth they have created than before.

The other way is simply making workers work longer and harder, through methods such as extending working hours and speed-up, for instance. In recent years, this has been increasingly used by capitalists in

New Zealand. As the NZ Ministry of Economic Development has noted PME investment in NZ (plant, machinery and equipment) has been nearly 25 percent lower than the average in OECD countries in recent years – 7 percent of GDP here, compared to 9 percent of GDP on average in the

OECD. Total investment, excluding residential investment, as a proportion of GDP has also been nearly a fifth lower in NZ than the OECD average. (See [http://www.med.govt.nz/irdev/econ\\_dev/growth-innovation/progress-2003/benchmark/benchmark-08.html#P419\\_80590](http://www.med.govt.nz/irdev/econ_dev/growth-innovation/progress-2003/benchmark/benchmark-08.html#P419_80590))

## Bosses viewpoint

Several years ago, the CTU attempted to encourage the government and employers to promote the first method of increasing productivity. They launched a campaign, complete with glossy promo material, to do this. While Business New Zealand's Phil O'Reilly welcomed the CTU's initiative, he argued, naturally enough from a capitalist viewpoint, that an even more business-friendly economic environment in New Zealand (lower company tax, even less union power, fewer resource management controls, etc) was necessary to encourage productivity-boosting investment (see: [www.businessnz.org.nz/.../050825%20remnet%20conference%20productivity%20pay.ppt](http://www.businessnz.org.nz/.../050825%20remnet%20conference%20productivity%20pay.ppt)). And there, of course, is the rub.

The capitalists always understand that their profits are dependent on exploitation and on maintaining the best possible conditions for that exploitation to proceed smoothly. In times of falling profitability, this will mean they need to attack workers' pay, living conditions and rights. Capitalism is inherently hostile to "an economy that works for everyone".

## An alternative economy

The unpalatable truth is that there are no solutions under capitalism. This is a difficult and unpopular argument to advance; people very naturally would prefer to hear that this or that proposal in the here and now could substantially improve things. Close examination of capitalism's workings shows otherwise. Strike action can win temporary gains, but, as our recent history shows, those gains can be quickly lost.

For workers, the only real alternative is one that starts from taking possession of all the wealth and wealth-producing processes and puts them at the service of the mass of humanity. A better deal for the mass of workers requires not an "alternative economic strategy" but an alternative economy.



# Ten year's making militant noise

This year, Wellington group Brass Razoo Solidarity Band clocked up its tenth year of street performances in support of workers' strikes and anti-war marches.

Writers from *The Spark* talked to BRSB founder Don Franks.

**The Spark:** How did the band start off?

**DF:** For a long time I've contributed little bits of music to support workers' battles, like making up songs and singing them on picket lines with my banjo. One day I bought this ancient tenor horn for twenty bucks. My idea was to stick it on the wall as an ornament but when I tried blowing I found it still worked. Next day I took it to blarp at an anti-sow crate demo, where they wanted lots of noise. Walking home afterwards, I envisaged lots of horns being played properly at a demo. I recalled that postie John Maynard had played cornet when he was a kid, so I rang him up and said "John, how about we make a union band?" He was keen, and it took off from there. Five of us got together and began rehearsing a rough garage group with a cornet, tenor horn, tuba, snare drum, and a bass drum made out of a rubbish bin.

**The Spark:** What was your first gig?

**DF:** A month or so after our formation we got the word that wharfies were picketing Carter Holt Harvey out in Tawa. We headed out with our drums and brass and made a racket alongside them. The workers liked it.

As we were packing up a lady from a plumbing warehouse across the road came over and said they wanted an Oompah band for the lads' Christmas do and would we play the gig? Our total repertoire then was just three numbers, plus we don't play for hire, so we passed the job to another band.

**The Spark:** Where did the band go from there?

**DF:** We rehearsed every week, improved a bit and got more members. Two of those were musical radio journalists who joined us to support their own strike and stayed on. There's thirteen of us now and always room for more.

**The Spark:** How many gigs have you done over the years?

**DF:** No-one's kept count, but it would be more than a



Brass Razoo in action

hundred, maybe two. We've played for just about every union except the Police Association. Mostly for low-paid workers like cleaners and caregivers; also teachers and students.

**The Spark:** Ten years is a long time — what's kept the band together?

**DF:** We've seen that what we do is worthwhile. Our playing breaks the ice at the start of a picket, especially if that picket's rather small. We help build a happy militant mood. Our group's independence helps keep our unity too. Right at the start we made a policy that we wouldn't play for any political parties. That was intended to stop us being hijacked by Labour — or some small left sect.

**The Spark:** What was your best gig?

**DF:** Hard to say, after a while they sort of blend into one. A memorable blow was busking to raise funds for the locked-out Progressive workers. We got hundreds of dollars in a very short time. The Civil Union victory parade was special for me. I also enjoyed playing the Internationale for striking hospital workers and telling them the significance of that number.

**The Spark:** What's the future for Brass Razoo?

**Don:** We're all still keen. I personally hope we keep playing long enough to blow a fanfare at the downfall of capitalism!



## Protests in Greece: "To have a general strike in Greece it is not such a big deal"

In the last issue of *The Spark* we reported on recent events from the class struggle in Greece. Some of the fiercest popular resistance to the current crisis of capitalism has erupted in Greece over the last couple of years. The latest chapter in this unfolding drama has been the revelation that Greece is unable to pay back the huge foreign debt that it has accumulated during its years of economic growth since joining the euro-zone in 2001. According to a report by Costas Lapavistas and other economists (<http://tiny.cc/a7e05>), the debt crisis is an inevitable consequence of the structure of the eurozone, which is extremely hierarchical.

A "core" comprising the richest countries (Belgium, France, Germany and Netherlands) dominates the "periphery" (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Germany has acquired the dominant position in the capitalist "race to the bottom" by squeezing its workers hard in the aftermath of reunification. German politicians and newspapers have been busy whipping up resentment against "profligate" Greeks, since a large chunk of the cost of the bailout package will fall on the German working class. However, it is only the militancy of the Greek workers that have prevented their living standards being pushed down even further than their already low level. It is time for German and other workers to start "learning Greek"!

Mike Kay, industrial officer for the Workers Party, who travelled in Greece in June, spoke to Stavros and Paulin from the OKDE (Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece) in Athens.

**MK:** Greece has been the focus of much of the debate about the problems of the European economy. Why does it occupy this special position?

**OKDE:** For several reasons, Greece is the weak link in the chain of the European Union (EU). Firstly, because of the weakness of Greek capital due to the reduction in the productive bases of industry and agriculture. Secondly, because of the weaknesses in the EU as a whole - renegotiation or non-payment of "toxic" debt may lead to the collapse of German and French banks. This may be enough to set off a "domino effect" leading to the collapse of several countries' economies. Thirdly, there is the Greek movement against austerity, of which the latest pact from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU is trying to break the backbone. Lastly, there is a very deep political crisis; the disintegration of the Pasok (Socialist party) government may have already begun.

**MK:** What have been the immediate effects of the crisis for Greek workers?

**OKDE:** Precariousness in employment has gone from being a marginal phenomenon to an everyday one. The labour aristocracy is being destroyed due to cuts in the public sector. Whole layers of the middle class are being destroyed. The attacks on the welfare state mean that now even the right wing newspapers are reporting that the long-term unemployed are forced to

turn to the churches for food relief.

Meanwhile the Greek bourgeoisie has totally capitulated to the IMF and EU. They are like Vichyists! Their only concern has been to try and save some small parts of Greek capital connected with the banking and finance sector. Most probably Greece will become the first country to be expelled from the Eurozone. It shows the depth of the crisis that one of the main strategic goals of the EU, the Euro, may be on the verge of collapse. If they do manage to preserve it, it will be on the basis of a very strict hierarchy. The European Central Bank would control Greece's budget extremely tightly.

**MK:** The social crisis in Greece first came to the attention of the world in December 2008 when the country erupted in riots sparked by the fatal police shooting of 15 year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos. What has happened since about bringing Alexis' killers to justice?

**OKDE:** Currently the trial of the police officers involved is drawing to an end. The judge is proposing that the cop is freed due to lack of evidence. The trial was held in a small city outside of Athens to prevent demonstrations. The movement of 2008 was mostly a youth revolt. The working class did not participate energetically - rather they looked on with sympathy. Now, we have broader social layers mobilising with deeper social potential.



## INTERVIEW

**MK:** Recently a protest resulted in the death of three bank workers who were asphyxiated by fumes from Molotov cocktails. What was behind that story?

**OKDE:** Since 2008, the anarchists have experienced fast growth, and have participated in acts of individual violence. Throwing of Molotovs and so on is common. It is not unexpected to burn a bank. The workers in the bank had wanted to strike on that day, but the boss locked them in. The building itself was not safe to use as a bank. Of course the right wing tried to use this incident to discredit the movement, but most people did not believe what they said.

**MK:** How do you explain the particular militancy of the movement?

**OKDE:** To have a general strike in Greece it is not such a big deal. This is because of the history of struggle. Three times bourgeois power has been challenged: in 1936 in Thessaloniki, again in the resistance movement against the Nazis and finally against the military coup in 1973. There has never been a heavy role of

the trade union bureaucracy. The reformist party Pasok does not have deep roots in the workers movement. It was set up from scratch in 1974, and was from the beginning a bourgeois party. There is workers' democracy in the functioning of the unions, and traditionally the far left has had quite wide influence. What is lacking is a co-ordinating centre for the militant mood.

**MK:** How did your tendency evolve?

**OKDE:** OKDE is the oldest far left organisation in Greece after the Communist Party, which was founded in 1918. We started out as the Left Opposition within the Communist Party from 1927, and became a separate organisation in 1934. At the time of the coup in 1967, we were part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth

International. Our organisation was rebuilt in 1974 as OKDE, but we disagreed with the leadership of the U-Sec over the policy of dissolving parties, etc. There is a different organisation called OKDE-Spartakos which is trying to find a Greek way of setting up an anti-capitalist party. We have good relations with them. In



General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) banner which reads "workers shouldn't pay the price for financial crisis".

the mid 1980s the U-Sec decided to recognise Spartakos as the official organisation, although their current membership has no continuity with the original OKDE group. They are mainly an organisation of students, we are mainly workers. Spartakos do not intervene in the movement autonomously. In contrast, an initiative from our comrades in Thessaloniki has set up several "first level" unions from scratch in a struggle involving restaurant workers not unlike what Unite union is doing in New Zealand.

### ***Subscribe to The Spark***

*The Spark* (16 pages) is published every 4 weeks.

☐ **The SPARK** \$15 for 11 issues or \$30 for 22 issues within NZ;

Australia \$A20 for 11 issues or \$A40 for 22 issues airmail.

☐ I would like to be notified about Workers Party events and activities

**Send payment to *The Spark*  
PO Box 10282, Dominion Rd,  
Auckland**



# 'MARXISM 2010' conference report

Jared Phillips, *The Spark* co-coordinating editor

The Workers Party held its annual MARXISM conference at Thistle Hall in Wellington over Queen's Birthday weekend from June 4-7. It was a weekend of anti-imperialist theory and activity. Approximately seventy members, supporters and other interested people attended throughout the weekend.

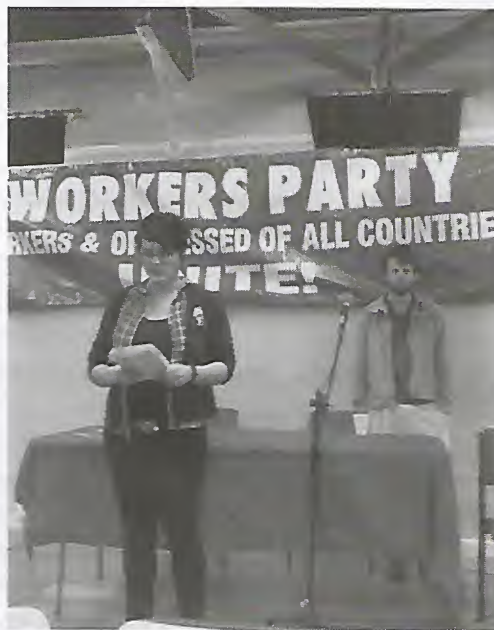
## Presenting and discussing revolutionary politics

The conference opened on the Friday night with WP national secretary Daphna Whitmore speaking on the revolutionary movement in India. The revolutionary zone spreads from the border with Nepal in the north to the southern states of India. This presentation and discussion was followed by John Edmundson, the WP's national education officer, speaking on New Zealand's imperialist role in the occupation of Afghanistan and the quagmire that the invading powers have found themselves in.

The second day began with two separate sessions. Half the audience attended Ian Anderson's examination of the history of queer liberation in New Zealand and around the world. The rest of the audience attended Joel Cosgrove's presentation on the Marxian concept of cultural capital. Following from these sessions, John Edmundson presented on Marxist political economy, its relevance today, and its relationship with campaigns for wage increases. Don Franks posed the question "What is Marxism?" He answered with a succinct presentation of Marx's method, dialectical materialism. The discussion revolved around the way in which Marxism is a theory in opposition to idealism and evolutionist reformism.

In the afternoon a debate on the question "Are population controls the answer to climate change?" took place between WP member Byron Clark and John Robinson, a former academic who has researched and written on rising population. John argued in favour of population and immigration controls. Byron opposed this and argued that radical social change and planned production were prerequisites for bringing environmental damage under control.

The final day of public sessions included a presentation by Phil Ferguson, the WP's national organiser, called "The Fire Last Time: Lessons of the 60s". This talk examined the material basis for the rise of the struggles in the 1960s with particular reference to women and oppressed minorities. The conference



Kassie Hartendorp introduces Ian Anderson, who presented a discussion of gay liberation

closed a review of The \$15 minimum wage campaign – by Don Franks and Daphna Whitmore. This was an important discussion to have. Part of the Workers Party's approach is to reflect on and critically assess its activities, and a lot of the organisation's efforts had gone into this campaign.

## Supporting Palestinian national liberation

The weekend of the conference was incidentally also the first opportunity for major protest in New Zealand against Israel's attacks on the Gaza-bound aid flotilla. The Wellington demonstration consisted of a march to the recently re-established Israeli embassy. The main demand of the demonstration was for the closure of the embassy, expressed in the slogan 'Close down the embassy, open up Gaza'. Conference organisers re-scheduled Saturday's conference sessions so that the Workers Party could fully participate in the action. This meant that we were able to send a reasonably large contingent which emphasized support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Mike





Walker (pictured above at the demonstration) spoke of the importance of providing material support to the Palestinian resistance.

On day three of the conference Mike Walker and Paul Hopkinson, two organisers of the PFLP Solidarity Campaign, made the case for supporting the PFLP. Paul emphasised that the Palestinian people shouldn't be thought of as mere victims who require false 'peace' from Western intervention. He explained that the Palestinian people are skilled and capable in the art of resistance and this resistance needs to be supported by working people internationally. Mike picked up on this theme and detailed the current situation of the PFLP and the international campaign to release Ahmad Sa'adat, one of the PFLP's imprisoned leaders. The conference drew over \$210 in T-shirt sales and donations for the PFLP Solidarity Campaign.

## Radical literature and merchandise

The Workers Party continues to publish original analytical material on a regular basis with the monthly pub-



lication of *The Spark* magazine and with a new line of pamphlets. Radical literature sales over conference weekend included the purchase of \$39 worth of original Workers Party pamphlets on a range of topics including Palestinian resistance, NZ imperialism in Afghanistan, and the revolution in Nepal. We also sold reprints of Arundhati Roy's 'Walking with the comrades', a piece she wrote about the oppression and resistance of peasant workers and rural people in India. Twenty-two copies of *The Spark* were also purchased. Additionally, a small amount of money - \$70 of raffle money and donations - was collected for the Workers Party.

## Democratic decision-making

The Workers Party's main annual internal meeting takes place in January but a shorter internal meeting was held at the end of this conference. The meeting agreed that the PFLP campaign had got off to an overall good start. There was agreement for more internal education on Palestinian liberation within the Workers Party - an example might be the organising of an extended workshop for members who are taking a lead on developing the campaign. It was reinforced that two or three people (including non-Workers Party members) should be taking the lead on developing the campaign in each major city. There were further goals set for developing the relationship between the PFLP and Workers Party.

The meeting then moved on to discussing the party's intervention in upcoming local body and general elections. In terms of local body elections a mayoralty campaign is being prepared in Christchurch and the Wellington branch has decided to conduct a campaign for either one or two council positions in Wellington. It is unlikely that local body campaigns will be run in Auckland or Hamilton. In terms of the next national general election, those present proposed that during the next all-up internal meeting in January we should formally reconsider whether it is worth maintaining the Workers Party's registration for the party list vote. Members pointed out that it was an achievement to register a party list for the last election, and that this increased our visibility to some degree, but overall this did not significantly help build the organisation.

It was then decided that Marxism 2011 will be hosted by the Auckland branch in June and that the party supports a separate mini educational conference being organised in Hamilton. The next internal meeting will be an all-up one in late-January 2011. One of the main agenda items will be the initiation and development of the 'right to strike / freedom at work' campaign.



# Red & purple: A Marxist perspective on queer liberation in New Zealand

The following article is an adaptation from a presentation delivered to the Marxism 2010 conference by Workers Party member Ian Anderson of the Wellington branch.

## What does queer liberation mean?

This article aims to deal with this question utilising historical materialism, the mode of enquiry pioneered by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Historical materialism explores social relations, such as homosexual oppression, by explaining the productive forces that shape them. With a particular focus on New Zealand history, this analysis aims to sketch the material basis of modern queerness, attempts to control or suppress it, and the politics that have emerged from this contradiction.

To deal with queer liberation, we must first define 'queer.' This is a heavily contested term, used both as an insult and a chosen identity. Queer theorist David Halperin, in *Saint Foucault*, has this to say:

*Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normal.*

So, to simplify, queerness is defined not as a thing in itself, but in opposition to normalcy, or attempts at control. Largely it refers to queerness of sexuality, gender or orientation. The question for Marxists then becomes, how are queer identities defined and formed? What is their material basis?

To answer this question, we need to set up a theoretical framework and undertake a historical analysis. This analysis will rely particularly on the work of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, and draws on the notion of 'historical specificity' which Karl Korsch emphasised from the writings of Karl Marx. Historical specificity means that our analysis must be specific to historical conditions: so it's not enough, for example, to claim that the National Party is conservative, we have to observe how they have changed and adapted historically.

Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci argued that under advanced capitalism, the system that exists in NZ today, the state would not rely primarily on direct repression. This means that they do not regularly use the police, army and other violent means to keep the

working class in check. Instead, the ruling class relies on ideological hegemony, a set of ideas maintained through the school system, churches, media and even unions. This forces revolutionaries into a war of position, in which we must develop a 'counter-hegemony,' a set of ideas that challenge the dominant system. This analysis will also observe the identity between these opposites; how in struggle they take on aspects of each other.

## Modern homosexuality

More recently, critical theorist Michel Foucault argued in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* that the homosexual came into being in 1870, when the word 'homosexuality' was first coined. Foucault sees modern homosexuality as a product of medical discourse, which controls and defines the way people live; this argument could be extended to other forms of queerness, and in fact any attempt to define reality. But is Foucault's thesis accurate?

Foucault's argument, that homosexuality is a recent phenomenon, is heavily contested. Scholars contend that not only did same-sex activity predate the modern era, numerous nouns predate 'homosexual,' for example: *sodomite*, *tribadist*, *eromenos*.

However, we can accept these criticisms while still arguing that norms of sexual behaviour, and words to describe it, change throughout history. For example, the Greek 'eromenos' is a young lover, taken by an older man, in a relationship as much driven by education as sexuality. This is distinct from the modern notion of homosexuality, which can cover any age bracket and doesn't always serve worthy educational purposes. But what is the material basis of this changing discourse?

In his essay *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, John D'Emilio fleshes out Foucault's argument, by explaining the material basis for the emergence of modern homosexuality. D'Emilio argues that the decline of the 'household economy,' over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century, is a significant factor. As people came to rely on commodities for survival, there was less of a need to rely on the family. Related to this, sex was increasingly separated from procreation, as birth-rates went into



decline and children were no longer necessary to perform labour; as a result, sex became more an expression of intimacy.

Another crucial aspect of D'Emilio's argument was the emphasis on urbanisation and free labour, which enabled the formation of new communities. No longer confined to isolated communities, migrants to these thriving new cities could assemble around bars, parties and drag balls, forming whatever communities they saw fit. This line of argument accurately describes historical development in NZ.

So if capitalism enabled the formation of new, queer communities, why are these communities oppressed and marginalised? D'Emilio argues that as sex is separated from procreation, the newly formed nuclear family becomes a symbol of stability. Reactionaries oppose perceived threats to this stability such as abortion, divorce and queer expression. Certainly this emphasis on one man, his wife and their children runs through reactionary rhetoric, as in a recent *Telegraph* opinion piece entitled "It Takes Two to Mend a Broken Society."

So, how about New Zealand? Prior to settlement by Europeans, Maori had no written records, and did not take detailed records of their sexual activities. It is difficult to draw conclusions. However, Maori scholars such as Ngahuia te Awakotoku argue that Maori carvings and oral traditions provide evidence of same-sex activity. For example, Ngahuia discusses a Maori bargeboard which was split into two parts, each taken to a different European museum, which depicts two men caressing each other's penises. Whatever form this love took in Maori society, we can safely assume it took different forms to emerging European societies.

## Influence of colonisation

The process of colonisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century introduced new forms of heavily contested sexuality. As Chris Brickell explains in *Mates and Lovers* his recent gay history of NZ:

*Colonial administrations complained that sexual 'vice' was widespread on the frontier. There the institutions of respectable society were weak, they reasoned, and incentives for self-control and clean living were nonexistent.*

*Colonial administrations attempted to police this sexual activity. After 1858, when all English laws were extended to NZ, sodomy became illegal in NZ. Later, in 1893, the Crimes Act defined any*

*sexual relations between men as assault. Lesbianism was not legally acknowledged, but women's sexual behaviour was policed through legislation such as the Contagious Diseases Act, which restricted women's ability to roam the streets.*



Theorist Michel Foucault

Brickell gives examples of deviant 19<sup>th</sup> Century sexual activity by drawing on court records. For example, in Dunedin circa 1889, two men named Christopher Dreaver and Raymond Burke met outside a theatre and arranged to meet in a hotel the next day. However, Burke's father told the police and Dreaver was arrested. This demonstrates the potential contained in the new urban spaces being constructed in the colonies; theatres were a traditional meeting spot for men hooking up with each other, and hotels tended to turn a blind eye.

The opportunities for women were more limited. Aiming to balance the gender makeup, colonial administrations sponsored female immigration to NZ, while heavily proscribing women's activities in the colonies. Women did not have the financial independence men had, or the freedom to roam the streets, both of which enabled same-sex encounters. Attempts to change this situation were met with scorn.

Over this period, the emerging medical establishment was entrusted with the role of defining sexuality and deciding what forms of sexual expression could fit into ideological hegemony. In the wake of Oscar Wilde's trial for "gross indecency," there was increasing negative interest in new queer communities. The term 'homosexual' was coined in 1869, but most definitively used in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which defined homosexuals as inverts. This was a shift from the definition of sodomy as a sin, one that tempted all men; instead homosexuality was defined as a state of mental inversion, sometimes linked to weak nerves and other physical maladies. As the medical bureaucracy took responsibility for defining queer communities, tabloids also paid increasing attention to 'Oscars,' 'queens' and 'inverts.'

The medical establishment also came to define transgender over the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They formed a discourse of 'gender dysphoria' or 'disorder,' holding monopoly over the right to legitimise these identities, to define their role in ideological hegemony. This new discourse was distinct from earlier forms such as the Samoan *fa'afine* (the fifth son raised female) or the South Asian Third Gender (a lower caste than the first and second gender.) In capitalist society,



# “End the Siege of Gaza”, but then what?

Mike Walker, PFLP Solidarity Campaign co-coordinator

On the May 31 commandoes from the Israeli Defence Force stormed a boat carrying aid and activists to the besieged Gaza strip, opening fire and killing 9 people on board. In a typical official Israeli response, Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon accused the flotilla's organisers of 'having ties to Hamas and al-Qaeda terror organisations'. This has been followed by so-called 'universal condemnation' of the attack by the 'International Community' and calls for an end to the siege. In practical terms this means allowing more goods into the Gaza Strip. What it doesn't mean is an end to Israeli control of the borders, the airspace, the coastal waters and literally every aspect of Palestinian life.

## Zionism

The seeds of the modern day conflict between the Zionist state of Israel and Arab resistance were firmly planted not in 1948, but with early Jewish settlers. Ahad Ha'Am (Asher Ginsberg) was a Russian Jew and Zionist, and a very prominent pre-state Zionist thinker, who visited Palestine from 1891 onwards. He explained that the Jewish settlers "treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, rob them of their rights in a dishonest way, hurt them without reason and then pride themselves on such actions." He concluded that "no one attacks this despicable and dangerous tendency..."

Why this aggression against the indigenous population of Palestine? The answer to this question lies in what Zionists are attempting to do in Palestine which was summarised by David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the Israeli state, in the introduction to *'The History of the Haganah'*. He wrote:

At the present time we speak of colonisation, and only of colonisation. It is our short-term objective. But it is clear that England belongs to the English, Egypt to the Egyptians and Judea to the Jews. We will say to the Arabs: 'Move Over'; if they are not in agreement, if they resist, we will push them by force.

The Israeli state is the modern manifestation of the Zionist colonial project that early Jewish settlers spearheaded in the late 1800s. Its actions throughout its history, the continuing oppression of Palestinians and the outlandish attack on solidarity activists should not be seen in isolation from Zionist goals in the Middle East.

## Imperialist domination

Prior to WWI, Chaim Weizmann, an early Zionist political leader, recognised that for the Zionist project to succeed in Palestine it would require, an 'intermediary stage' during which the 'fair country of Palestine will be protected by such a Mighty and just Power as Great Britain.' He explained that 'under the wing of this power, Jews will be able to develop, and to set up the administrative machinery which...would enable us to carry out the Zionist scheme.' Under the British mandate in Palestine and with the protection and political support of British imperialism the foundation of the Zionist state was firmly laid. In fact Zionism's expulsion of three quarters of a million Palestinians, al-nakba, and



Israeli settlement under construction in East Jerusalem, West Bank.



## ISRAEL/PALESTINE

declaration of statehood in 1948 could not have been achieved without the British quashing of a Palestinian revolt, which had lasted from 1936 until 1939.

The post-WWII balance of world power shifted and Zionism proved to be politically dynamic, as it was able to realign itself with the new dominant imperial power, the United States. The US State Department noted in 1945 that oil reserves in the Middle East constitute "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history." In 1973 Senator Henry Jackson exposed American reliance on Israel to defend these interests stating that its job was to "inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab States....who, were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principal sources of petroleum in the Persian Gulf". Today the United States provides \$US three billion in military aid every year to Israel, and has helped Israel to build one of the most powerful militaries in the world. In exchange Israel was, and continues to be, America's "attack dog" in the Middle East and protector of American interests.

Imperialist backers also provide political cover. Barack Obama's administration recently blocked a Security Council resolution to have the flotilla raid impartially investigated, suggesting instead that Israel investigate itself.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quickly seized on this opportunity to clear Israel of wrongdoing and announced a commission featuring three elders of the Israeli state and two international observers, one of whom recently joined the 'Friends of Israel' in Britain. The United States hailed the decision and released a statement saying that "Israel has a military justice system that meets international standards and is capable of conducting a serious and credible investigation." A fair investigation by Israel into the events leading to the deaths of nine activists and into the legality of the siege of Gaza, is highly unlikely. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine called the Israeli commission a "transparent attempt to justify murder and piracy". *Haaretz*, an Israeli newspaper, ran an article which surmised that the intention was to "placate the world...especially the United States."

### Investigating the raid on the freedom flotilla

Calls for 'investigations' though, regardless of who conducts them, expose a blatant and recurring amnesia in the West in terms of Israeli violations of Palestinian rights. In September 2009 a UN fact finding mission presented its findings to the Council of Human Rights in Geneva, after impartially investigating Israel's

"Operation Cast Lead". Known as the *Goldstone Report* it concluded that "The tactics used by Israeli military armed forces in the Gaza offensive are consistent with previous practice", which was described as the "application of disproportionate force and the causing of great damage and destruction to civilian property and infrastructure, and suffering to civilian populations." This was unacceptable to the United States so the House of Representatives passed a resolution stating that "the report [was] irredeemably biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy." The US pledged to "stand by Israel in the fight against the *Goldstone Report*", and the reach of American influence was visible when the Palestinian Authority also deferred endorsing the report's findings. Any investigation that condemns Israeli actions will realistically be ostracised by the US, Israel and its allies rendering it impotent.

### A complete end to Israel's brutality?

While we should condemn the killing of the flotilla activists, we should also remember that Palestinians face this kind of oppression and brutality every day of their lives at the hands of the Israeli state, as it continues its expansionist project that is funded and politically supported by the world's imperialist powers. It is time to start concentrating on the real causes of their oppression and the means by which Israel's domination is maintained in the Middle East.

**Support Workers Party's solidarity campaign with Palestinian resistance and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Order a PFLP T-shirt (shown below) today.**



**Order on-line at:  
[www.workersparty.org.nz](http://www.workersparty.org.nz)**



# Card Tricks

Don Franks

It was a normal startup on our job the other day, cleaners hurrying in to dump coats and sort out gear for the early morning shift. Our supervisor cast an eagle eye around the crew.

"Ok, everyone's all here – anyone need any stuff?"

" Yes, couple of things"

"What?"

"Can we have a mini-bar and a masseur in our cubby hole?"

Everyone laughed a bit including the boss. "There's no bloody credit cards on this job and you're not MPs with time to fiddle them. Ok, lets get on with it."

Media focus on MPs credit cards has largely centred on "misuse". The Dominion Post campaigned: "Keep the MPs honest", i.e. use the cards "properly" and then all will be well. From a different view point, Unite leader Matt McCarten noted:

Several of them bought booze and flowers for either their spouse or someone else. But given it appears they had, in the main, reimbursed their personal items it's hardly a scandal that should keep us outraged for more than a day. I'm sure many employees with company cards have rung up the occasional personal item. Provided they explain the circumstances with a quick reimbursement then most employers will accept it.

It's the nature of the MPs "occasional personal item" that needs exposure to daylight. Such as the \$6000 spent on limousines by Chris Carter during a four-day trip to Adelaide in April 2004. Or the \$466 mini-bar bill racked up in the space of one week by Trade Minister Tim Groser during the Copenhagen climate change conference. Which was moderate compared to the \$509.90 bar bill racked up by Murray McCully across two days in Tokyo last year.

McCully's efforts were topped by former Arts, Culture and Heritage minister Judith Tizard. She blew \$200 on two bottles of wine at a dinner in downtown Auckland. A \$155 bottle of Bollinger and a \$55 bottle of Allan Scott wine went on the former Central Auckland MP's credit card to wash down a feed of roast salmon, grilled tuna and fresh figs.

Not to be outdone at the table was former Labour Minister Parekura Horomia. His \$1816.62 credit card bill for June 2005 included \$1613.54 in restaurant expenses.

Some may say, well, good luck to them, critics are just envious. Envy is the resentment of a more fortunate person. As it's our toil that made those wastrel MPs more fortunate than us, any resentment is

fully justified. The half a million workers in New Zealand on less than \$15 an hour don't ever experience the luxuries that some MPs take as their daily due.

The cross party MPs' credit card scandal is a parade of capitalist values.

One such value is the Labour Party leader's attitude to women. When Labour list MP Shane Jones was questioned about the cost of renting 50 movies while staying at hotels, he at first denied recalling if they'd been pornography. Then, when confronted with the fact he blustered that he was a "red blooded adult".

Jones' sexism was defended by Labour leader Phil Goff who said "What people do in the privacy of their own room is up to them. I'm not about to judge people's behaviour."

After the fuss has died down MPs will probably be a bit more discrete about the acquisition of their luxuries, but any promises of "keeping our representatives honest" are just empty talk. The credit card pigout reminds us that capitalism's inbuilt exploitation and privilege can't sustain a political system representing workers interests.



Labour MPs Chris Carter (above) and Shane Jones

